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Some Phases of Reading in the Elementary School

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by R. H. Lane under the title "Some Phases of Reading in
the City Schools."

Los Angeles City School District
Division of Educational Research

February, 1919

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1. A Test in Oral Reading

Because the Educational Journal is largely a principals' magazine, this article is addressed primarily to the elementary principal who desires to attack the problem of reading in his school. As far as possible, the writer wishes to put this into the form of a friendly talk rather than in the form of a finished essay, so that while we may lose something in the way of style, we may, perhaps, gain thereby in directness and simplicity.

First of all, I should impress on the teachers of your building that reading is the most important subject with which we have to deal in the elementary school. Unfortunately, there is a tendency in this city, as well as elsewhere, to measure a child's progress, if not actually to decide upon his fitness for promotion, by his ability in arithmetic. Now, while arithmetic is a highly important subject, and merits our best attention, it is altogether conceivable that men and women may get along successfully in life with only a modicum of arithmetical skill. Indeed, the average person in adult life has little use for anything but the simple fundamental processes of addition, subtraction and multiplication, while reading functions to an enormous degree in the affairs of every day life, not only in conducting the affairs of the working day, but in the right employment of one's leisure. Hence, the position of so many teachers that reading as a subject, is of relatively little importance beyond the first and second grades is hardly a tenable one.

In the next place, I should point out to the teachers that reading is an extremely complex subject, and one which is exceedingly hard to teach. Nothing is easier than to distribute readers to a class and to call upon the individual members to read in turn with an occasional criticism by the teacher. Such a lesson could hardly be called a reading lesson, but it is considered so in unfortunately too many cases. Again, there is a lack of clear understanding that reading must be considered both from the standpoint of silent reading and oral reading. Many teachers regard reading as synonymous with oral reading, neglecting entirely the wide field of silent reading. In the elementary school, it is indeed necessary to devote considerable time to oral recitations in reading, but the time given to oral reading should decrease from lower grades to higher grades, and the time given to silent reading increased from grade to grade until in the higher grades of the elementary school silent reading should receive most attention. In adult life, one's oral reading demands relatively an insignificant portion of our time, while silent reading for information or for pleasure is an indispensable part of daily life.

Then, too, reading is complex in that the attempt to analyze a reading situation is not an easy task. To discover why a child fails in reading and to prescribe an adequate remedy calls forth the best skill which the teacher possesses; a task which is complicated by the truth that there is no panacea for poor reading, but every case, in a very real sense, must be judged upon its own merits.

The first step in studying a reading situation in the elementary school is to divide the problem in as many phases as necessary and then to attack each phase in a systematic and deliberate manner. In the present paper, I propose to discuss only oral reading, leaving a consideration of silent reading to a later paper. Obviously the first thing to do is to find out what sort of vocabulary children in the lowest grades have at their command. If the State Texts (Free and Treadwell Primer, First and Second Readers) have been followed as basal texts, it is well for the principal to examine the children as to their power to recognize at sight the more common words in the vocabularies of the several books. The Primer and First Reader contain word lists which the principal may use, or the same words may be found upon the flash cards which the publishers of the series have for sale. In case some other series of readers have been used for basal readers, the word lists will be found either in the books themselves or in the manuals with which the publishers accompany their readers.

In all grades from the low second to the high eighth (B2-A8), inclusive, children should be tested on that very obvious accomplishment, the rate of oral reading. All other things being equal, a child who can read unfamiliar material suited to his years at a standard rate of speed is a better reader than the child who just stumbles along. We have worked out very definite standards in this regard and the principal has here at his disposal an accurate measuring rod. In my own work, I use what is known as Starch's Reading Test, Form A. This consists of eight selections, one for each grade, which the children are asked to read orally. These selections have been carefully selected from a well known series of reading texts and are admirably adjusted to the powers of normal children. For the sake of making this clear the first few lines of each selection is reproduced herewith.

1.

Once there was a little girl who lived with her mother.
They were very poor.
Sometimes they had no supper.
Then they went to bed hungry. Etc.

2.

Betty lived in the South long, long ago. She was only ten years old, but she liked to help her mother.

She had learned to do many things. She could knit and sew and spin; but best of all she liked to cook. Etc.

3.

Little Abe hurried home as fast as his feet could carry him. Perhaps if he had worn stockings and shoes like yours he could have ran faster. But instead, he wore deerskin leggings and clumsy moccasins of bearskin which his mother had made for him. Etc.

4.

The red squirrel usually waked me in the dawn, running over the roof and up and down the sides of the house as if sent out of the woods for this very purpose.

In the course of the winter I threw out half a bushel of ears of sweet corn onto the snow crust by my door and was amused by watching the antics of the various animals which were baited by it. Etc.

5.

Once upon a time, there was a very rich man, and a king besides, whose name was Midas; and he had a little daughter, whom nobody but myself ever heard of, and whose name I either never knew or have entirely forgotten. So, because I love odd names for little girls, I choose to call her Marygold. Etc.

6.

In a secluded and mountainous part of Styria there was in old times a valley of the most surprising and luxuriant fertility. It was surrounded on all sides by steep and rocky mountains, rising into peaks which were always covered with snow, and from which a number of torrents descended in constant cataracts. Etc.

7.

Captain John Hull was the mint-master of Massachusetts, and coined all the money that was made there. This was a new line of business, for in the earlier days of the colony the current coinage consisted of gold and silver money of England, Portugal and Spain. These coins being scarce, the people were often forced to barter their commodities instead of selling them. Etc.

8.

The years went on, and Ernest ceased to be a boy. He had grown to be a young man now. He attracted little notice from the other inhabitants of the valley; for they saw nothing remarkable in his way of life, save that, when the labor of the day was over he still loved to go apart and gaze and meditate upon the Great Stone Face. Etc.

In giving this test (which can be procured in printed sheets), the principal should provide himself with two copies of each sheet, mounted for better preservation on cardboard, and should carefully annotate his own copy so as to show the cumulative number of words line by line as follows:

Betty lived in the South long, long ago.

8 She was only ten years old, but she liked to

18 help her mother.

21 She had learned to do many things. She

29 could knit and sew and spin; but best of all she. Etc.

If time permits the children of each grade, B2-A8, should be taken in groups not to exceed five pupils as a time, and each pupil should be asked to read the appropriate selection for exactly one minute, no more and no less, the examiner carefully noting by the second hand of his watch the lapse of time. By referring to the annotated sheet in the examiner's hand, he can tell at a glance the number of words read per minute. The selections should be chosen as follows:

B2 pupils should be asked to read from Sheet 1.

A2 and B3 pupils from Sheet 2.

A3 and B4 pupils from Sheet 3.

- A4 and B5 pupils from Sheet 4.
- A5 and B6 pupils from Sheet 5.
- A6 and B7 pupils from Sheet 6.
- A7 and B8 pupils from Sheet 7.
- A8 pupils from Sheet 8.

As each child reads, the number of words read per minute should be carefully recorded, together with such observations on each case as the principal may care to make. When an entire class has read, the names should be arranged in order from the best reader to the slowest, as follows:

B3 Class	1. John.....125
	2. Mary123
	3. Hattie104
	4. Martha 96
	and so on down to
	35. Herbert ... 33
	36. Sam 31

The score of the middle reader in the group will be the median score for the class, if there is an odd number of pupils, or halfway between the two middle scores if an even number. At the bottom of the sheet the examiner should make the following note, assuming that these figures are found on his score sheet:

	Slowest Reader.	Median Reader.	Fastest Reader.
My School	31	96	125
Standard	85	110	135

For this purpose the principal will need to have for ready reference a table showing the rates of oral reading. Last year we worked out with nearly a thousand pupils the rates of oral reading in the city schools and these are given below:

Oral Reading Rates
(Words per minute.)

Class.	Minimum.	Median.	Maximum.
B2	75.....	100.....	125
A2	80.....	105.....	130
B3	85.....	110.....	135
A3	90.....	115.....	140
B4	95.....	120.....	145
A4	105.....	130.....	155
B5	115.....	140.....	165
A5	125.....	150.....	175
B6	135.....	160.....	185
A6	140.....	165.....	190
B7	145.....	170.....	195
A7	150.....	175.....	200
B8	155.....	180.....	205
A8	160.....	185.....	210

This simply means that we desire all A5 pupils for example to read orally between 125 and 175 words per minute at the beginning of the term's work. (At the end of the term this table should be advanced an entire point throughout.) We desire such pupils to read about 150 words per minute, if possible, but they may not read less than 125 words nor more than 175 words per minute. If a child fails in this class to read that lower limit, he should take reading in a lower class than his own as he is obviously poorly graded with respect to reading. If a child reads faster than the maximum limit for his class, one of two things is true—either he reads so fast as to be unintelligible, and should be required to slacken his rate, or he is too good a reader for his grade and should be given an opportunity to read with an advanced class.

When the principal has completed his tests he will find it greatly to his advantage to construct a simple graph showing the standard limits for oral reading, and to superimpose upon this the achievements of his own school grade by grade. He will then be able to see at once the strong and weak places among his classes with respect to oral reading rates.

It has been objected that this test does not really measure reading, but only the ability to call words. This objection is not valid, as it rests upon the supposition that one can measure reading in one operation. As a matter of fact no one test has ever been devised nor ever will be devised that will measure all phases of oral reading. The field is so complex that we are compelled to divide it into sections and measure a relatively small part at one time. Word-calling is such a part and a legitimate part as it refers to the vocabulary which a child has at his disposal. The first step in the acquisition of any language whether our own or a foreign tongue, is the possession of an adequate vocabulary of sight words, together with the possession of enough phonic power to handle successfully unfamiliar words. The above test does measure a child's vocabulary, as his reading rate depends absolutely upon his recognition of the words in the selections read. The test is, however, only one of many which must be made in order to properly evaluate a pupil's ability in reading, but it is the first step and a valuable one if considered properly with regard to its limitations. After the test has been given the principal has a definite amount of information regarding one phase of the pupil's power to read.

How to interpret these results and how to prescribe remedies for the deficiencies found will be taken up in the next section.

2. Interpreting the Oral Reading Test.

The method of administering Starch's oral reading test has been described, and we may assume that the principal is now ready to tabulate, graph and interpret his results. The first step is to arrange the returns in a table showing the median achievement of each class compared with the standards stated, somewhat like the following. For the sake of clearness we will assume that these figures represent the standing of an imaginary school which we will call the Horace Mann School. The figures are not direct transcripts from the records of any Los Angeles City School, but are combined from several records and it is believed that they fairly represent con-

ditions in many of our buildings. A building with only six grades is chosen, as many of our buildings do not have the upper classes.

Table One—Median Rates in Oral Reading:

	B2	A2	B3	A3	B4	A4	B5	A5	B6	A6
Standard	100	105	110	115	120	130	140	150	160	165
Horace Mann	34	69	97	102	113	125	137	153	181	165

This table will be much more easily grasped if it is expressed in the form of a graph which is reproduced herewith. You will observe that the horizontal lines represent the successive rates of oral reading, and the vertical lines the successive classes. The heavy lines represent the upper and lower limits of desirable reading, and the middle dotted line the desired median in each case. The fourth line represents the median achievement of the Horace Mann School, class by class.

You will notice at once that the chief problem in the rapidity of oral reading of this school lies in the lower grades. The B2 and A2 classes not only fail to reach the median, but fail to reach even the lower limits of desirable oral reading rates. From the B3 to the A6 classes there is a steady improvement, the B3, A3 and B4 classes being a little slow, while the succeeding classes approximate or exceed the standard. The B6 class almost touches the upper limit of oral reading rates.

Let us consider somewhat in detail the failure of the second grade classes to measure up to the desired pitch of efficiency. It may well occur to the principal of the Horace Mann School that the standards set are too high, and that they are not easily reached by normal children. To clear this matter somewhat, we will give a direct transcript from the record sheet of a B2 class in one of the city schools, a school which in the opinion of its principal and teachers is not an exceptional school, considered with reference to the social status of the pupils, but a good all-round school of middle-class American children.

Table Two—Oral Reading Rates, Five Highest Pupils B2 Class, School "A":

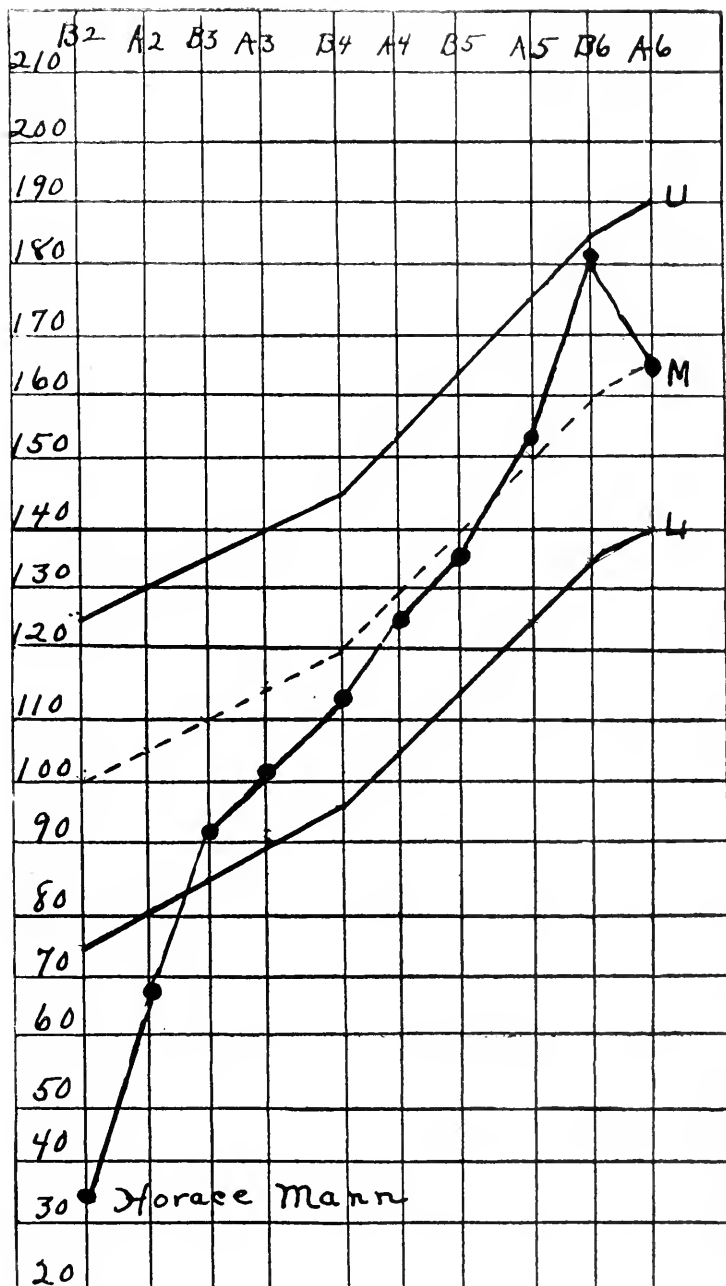
Name.	Words per minute.	Name.	Words per minute.
1. Annie	148	4. Nathan	104
2. Eloise	131	5. Katherine	92
3. Dolores	119	Median for the 15 highest pupils, 87.	

Let us add to this the record of five A2 children in another city school:

Table Three—Oral Reading Rates, Five Highest Pupils, A2 Class, School "B":

Name.	Words per minute.	Name.	Words per minute.
1. Marjorie	156	4. Wallace	107
2. Helen	156	5. Gerald	120
3. Robert	116	Median for the 10 highest pupils, 102.	

From a study of the above tables it will appear that the standards set for the several classes are not unreasonable, nor above the ability of normal children. Let us examine, then, the class record sheets of the Horace Mann pupils in the B2 and A2 classes. We will take the records of the five best pupils in each class and arrange them in tabular form.



Rates of Oral Reading. Horace Mann School

Table Four—Oral Reading Rates, Five Highest Pupils, B2 Pupils, Horace Mann School:

Name.	Words per minute.	Name.	Words per minute.
1. John	73	4. Robert	48
2. Mary	69	5. Helen	45
3. James	51		

Table Five—Oral Reading Rates, Five Highest Pupils, A2 Pupils Horace Mann School:

Name.	Words per minute.	Name.	Words per minute.
1. Cynthia	98	4. Gerald	70
2. Eva	87	5. Jerome	69
3. Martha	73		

It will be seen that not one of the five highest B2 pupils recorded reached the lower limit on our graph, and three of the five A2 pupils failed to reach that limit. How shall we account for this condition?

Suppose that the adult reader of these lines takes an easy second reader, selects a simple story and reads slowly and deliberately for exactly one minute, then counts the number of words read. While we must allow somewhat for the personal equation, the average achievement of the adult reader will be between 130 and 160 words. Why, then, does a child going over material which we assume is fitted to his years, make the poor showing displayed in Tables Three and Four above? While this question may be answered in almost an infinite number of ways, there is one answer which will suggest itself at once to the thoughtful reader—with the adult reader the recognition of words in the selection is immediate; with the child it is not immediate, and the difference in time between adult and childish recognition of the words in the selection is the major difference between good reading and poor reading.

We have now narrowed our problem down to a question of vocabulary. The adult reader has a large stock of sight words which he is able to recognize immediately; the Horace Mann child in the second grade has so small a vocabulary that his equipment is entirely inadequate to cope with any reading situation which confronts him. The principal of the Horace Mann School may well pause and inquire into the causes of the impoverished condition of the reading vocabularies of his second grade pupils, and, to a less degree, of his third grade pupils:

We shall never run this matter down to its conclusion unless we break it up into several factors and exhaust the possibilities of each in turn. Let us consider the following as possible factors in a situation which is admittedly very complex:

1. What kind of teaching is done in the first three grades of the Horace Mann School? May we safely blame the poor showing above upon poor teaching?

This is a question for the Horace Mann principal alone to answer, but he will do well to refrain from forming a too hasty conclusion on the matter. Occasionally, poor teaching will explain a situation of this kind, but in the experi-

ence of the writer poor teaching—not misdirected or ineffectual teaching, but out-and-out miserable technique—is rare in a city school system.

2. Granted that the Horace Mann teachers are, in the main, good teachers in the technical sense, what is the general policy of the school with regard to reading? Is there a concerted attack by all teachers together with the principal upon those objectives in reading which experience shows are desirable of attainment? Does each teacher teach reading well according to her own views as to what constitutes good reading, but with supreme indifference as to her neighbor's views on the subject? Does the principal by wise supervision attempt to correct this condition or does he allow this condition to persist so long as the several teachers claim to get results each after her own method?

This is a searching question and in the answer to it lies the solution of the reading difficulties not only of Horace Mann, but of all other schools finding themselves in similar circumstances. I shrewdly suspect that Horace Mann School has no reading policy at all. The principal appears to have administered his school wisely and well as far as administrative details go; the children are orderly; the spirit throughout the building is all that could be desired; the program of the school moves quickly and smoothly; the teachers are happy at their work, and there is an atmosphere of industry throughout the building, yard and shops. But the principal does not know what method of teaching reading is followed by his first grade teachers, except in a most superficial way, and the B2 teacher cannot tell me how the B1 teacher is attacking her problems.

3. Let us continue this inquisition a little farther.

(a) What basal method is being used in the lowest grades? A synthetic method, a content method or some combination of the two? Does the principal know the difference between the two clearly enough to decide which is best for his school?

(b) Granted that the B1 teacher has a defensible method of teaching beginning reading, is that method continued consistently throughout the three lower grades so as to secure a reasonable uniformity with respect to method? For example, does the B1 teacher teach the Gordon method, while the A1 teacher teaches Progressive Road?

(c) Is there a reasonable uniformity with respect to supplementary reading? What kind of supplementary readers are found in the three lower grades of the Horace Mann School? Upon what basis were they selected? What is the relative difficulty of the supplementary Primer selected compared with the State Series Primer, which is the required basal reader? How many words are there in the vocabulary of the supplementary Primer selected? Does it contain a relatively small number—not to exceed 250 words—or does it contain 400 words or more? What supplemental First Reader is in use and how large a vocabulary does it contain?

(d) Are phonics taught? Is the teacher definite; progressive from grade to grade; systematic; or is the teaching of phonics an incidental affair? What phonic power over unfamiliar words do the pupils possess at the close of the

first year of school? Is phonics made an aim in and for itself, or does it grow naturally out of the daily reading lesson?

(e) How large a vocabulary does the B1 teacher expect her pupils to have at the close of the first term of school? Do the pupils have this vocabulary so well in hand that their recognition of words from it is immediate? How often does the principal check this item up? How many new words does the A1 teacher attempt to add to this list during the pupil's second term in school? The B2 teacher? The A2 teacher? The B3 teacher? The A3 teacher? Is the growing vocabulary of the child checked at frequent intervals? Does this vocabulary contain the essential words?

We do not expect the principal of the Horace Mann School to be able to answer all these questions at sight. We expect that it will take him some time to get in hand so complex a problem as that presented by primary reading in most elementary schools. We do feel, however, that the attempt to answer these questions thoughtfully and intelligently, and other like questions which will suggest themselves, will be a long step toward better oral reading.

One other item in interpreting results deserves attention. By referring to our graph we notice that the B6 class exceeds the standard median so far as to nearly touch the upper limit of desirable oral reading rates for that class. Why does this class do so much better than the A6 class? An examination of the B6 record sheet shows that this class contains an unusually large number of rapid oral readers. Is this a chance occurrence? (Any experienced principal will testify that occasionally a single class will seem to attract all the bright particular stars of an entire school, and continue from kindergarten to graduation the delight of their teachers and a source of envy to the other classes in the building.) Or has this B6 teacher developed a technique of oral reading which is superior to that of her fellow teachers? These questions must be seriously considered by the thoughtful principal. Let me beg him, above all things, to investigate such a situation as this, and not to dismiss it with an off-hand judgment upon the matter. Surely the cause of unusual success as well merits our attention as the cause of unusual failure.

3. The Problem of Variability

Our system of grading in the Elementary Schools rests upon two assumptions, neither of which is entirely true: first, that for administrative convenience pupils may be successfully divided into instruction groups on a chronological basis, and second, that successive groups of this kind represent regularly increasing mental levels. As a matter of fact experienced teachers know that classes are very rarely homogeneous groups, but are made up of individuals varying widely from each other, both in native ability and educational achievement, while nearly any principal can select A3 pupils, for example, who are brighter and capable of more brilliant mental work, not only relatively but absolutely, than certain A4 pupils in the same school. Hence we have set up in the educational organization the two phenomena which we term (a) Variability, and (b) Overlapping.

(It may be discouraging to the busy principal to read that he cannot get far in his study of variability without possessing a fair background of knowledge based on more or less extensive reading of certain scientific books, but this I believe to be almost necessary to the successful handling of the subject. To those who have made little or no study along this line, allow me to recommend the reading of the following books in the exact order in which they are given:

1. Davenport—Domesticated Animals and Plants.
2. Herbert—The First Principles of Heredity.
3. Thorndike—Mental and Social Measurements.
4. Rugg—Statistical Methods Applied to Education.)

Let us examine the record sheet of oral reading rates of the A4 class in the Horace Mann School. For the sake of convenience it is reproduced below in full:

Table One—Oral Rates of Reading—A4 Class Horace Mann School

Name—		Words per Minute	Name—		Words per Minute
1.	John	176	17.	Marian	119
2.	Mary	172	18.	Arthur	113
3.	Geraldine	163	19.	Wesley	108
4.	Eva	156	20.	Eleanor	105
5.	Jack	151	21.	Sadie	98
6.	Herbert	151	22.	Jessie	95
7.	Martha	146	23.	Henry	89
8.	Edward	138	24.	Justin	87
9.	Sam	136	25.	Robert	71
10.	Leona	131	26.	Havelock	70
11.	Genevieve	130	27.	Lucy	60
12.	Elizabeth	128	28.	Webster	59
13.	Horace	127	29.	Jeannette	52
14.	William	127	30.	Nellie	47
15.	Eddie	125	31.	Frances	41
16.	Delbert	125			

Median, 125.

Standard, 130

An examination of this record at once suggests some interesting problems. Is variation of this kind permissible, or should the teacher strive to "bring up" each child to a dead level (or near it) of achievement? If variation is to be allowed, how much deviation from the standard of the class as a whole is to be allowed in individual cases? How can the teacher adjust her work to satisfy the varying needs of all pupils in the group?

Let us state at once for the comfort of the teacher that variation is to be expected in all cases, accepted and planned for. Any teacher who attempts to "bring up" each child to an exact standard is going directly in the face of

all the scientific knowledge which we possess regarding the existence of variation in mental traits. All pupils are "born long" in some subjects, "born short" in others and can labor and be labored with successfully only insofar as their limitations are considered. (The overconscientious teacher is referred to William Hawley Smith's "All the Children of All the People" for enlightenment on this point.) This does not mean, of course, that the median of the class as a whole should not conform closely to the standard accepted for all classes of the same grade, but each pupil is to be regarded as satisfactory whose record falls anywhere inside the generous limits which we have set.

By referring again to Table One, it will be noticed that four children exceed the upper limit set for satisfactory oral reading. My notes show that John, Geraldine and Eva are truly excellent readers. Their recognition of words was immediate, their phrasing was good, and their expression adequate, not because they had been taught "elocution", but because they enjoyed the subject matter and unconsciously expressed their appreciation through their rendition of it. Mary was not a good oral reader because she read so rapidly as to be unintelligible, due to the fact that her mental grasp of the selection exceeded her power to properly use her vocal organs. Articulation drills were suggested as a remedy in her case, coupled with the cultivation of a lower rate of oral reading.

The last five pupils on the list experienced great difficulty in reading the assigned selection. One had a marked speech defect, one was abnormally nervous, one had weak eyes and consequent defective vision, while the remaining two pupils were victims of improper grading. I enquired of the children if they read orally every day, and was answered in the affirmative. I enquired further if all members of the class read the same material, and was told that at the reading period the reading books were passed to the entire class and each member read orally in turn.

It must be apparent to the most superficial observer that such a procedure is indefensible to the last degree, except insofar as the "average" children (i. e., Sam to Arthur, inclusive,) are concerned. Frances, Nellie and Jeannette are daily put upon the rack by being required to read material far too difficult for them, while John, Mary and Geraldine are penalized by listening to pupils plod through selections which they themselves grasp instantly.

Table Two—A4 Class—Horace Mann School Divided Into Speed Groups

I.	1. John	3. Genevieve
	2. Mary	4. Eva
II.	1. Jack	9. Horace
	2. Herbert	10. William
	3. Martha	11. Eddie
	4. Edward	12. Delbert
	5. Sam	13. Marian
	6. Leona	14. Arthur
	7. Genevieve	15. Wesley
	8. Elizabeth	16. Eleanor

III. 1. Sadie	7. Lucy
2. Jessie	8. Webster
3. Henry	9. Jeanette
4. Justin	10. Nellie
5. Robert	11. Frances
6. Havelock	

This grouping has one serious defect, and that lies in the fact that the rapid group is too small for effective work, while the slow group is too large. This may automatically be avoided by dividing classes on the percentile basis until variability is somewhat reduced. This simply means that the class is divided into the poorest one-fourth or 25 percentile, the middle one-half or 50 percentile, and the best one-fourth or 75 percentile. Arranged on this basis the final grouping of our A4 class would appear thus:

Group I—"Express" or "Rapid" Group—

1. John	5. Jack
2. Mary	6. Herbert
3. Geraldine	7. Martha
4. Eva	8. Edward

In strictly departmental schools these eight pupils should be allowed to take reading with the B5 class, or possibly farther up, wherever they will be associated with children of equal power in reading. If this is not possible, this group should have their reading so arranged that they will read orally very little, and silently a great deal, working not so much out of the uniform readers as out of individual assignments, coming together occasionally for report and discussion. To require such children to continue daily oral reading is to continue firing at game that has long since been brought down.

Group II—"Regular" or "Average" Group—

1. Sam	9. Marian
2. Leona	10. Arthur
3. Genevieve	11. Wesley
4. Elizabeth	12. Eleanor
5. Horace	13. Sadie
6. William	14. Jessie
7. Eddie	15. Henry
8. Delbert	

This group should be handled in the manner called for by any group of children whose abilities are similar within generous limits. This group would certainly not read orally every day; certain lessons would be assigned for intensive silent study; other lessons for rapid silent reading; other lessons would be devoted to memorization and still others for reading to the class by the teacher.

Group III—"Accommodation" or "Slow" Group—

- | | |
|-------------|-------------|
| 1. Justin | 5. Webster |
| 2. Robert | 6. Jeanette |
| 3. Havelock | 7. Nellie |
| 4. Lucy | 8. Frances |

This group would receive the most careful study upon individual needs that the teacher could make. The treatment for these cases cannot be suggested here as each child would have to have work especially devised for him. For this group there would be a great deal of oral reading in easy supplementary texts, possibly easy Third Readers, probably easy Second Readers, and in one or two cases First Readers and Primers. Phonic drills should be abundant, carefully graded and frequently checked for results. (Personally I think the Gordon Teachers' Manual is a tremendous help along this line.) Vocabulary lists should be checked as the child adds to his stock of sight words, and exercises should be developed for the cultivation of "eye sweep".

One word in conclusion. The busy teacher will say "This plan increases my work three fold: instead of one reading class you have given me three." The answer is that each group will not recite every day. As the teacher develops her silent reading plans more fully, she will devise plans whereby the time of the two groups which are not reciting at a particular time may be profitably employed. At the present time silent reading with us has not been developed as it must be in the future.

4—Overlapping

The problem of overlapping is one that more intimately concerns the principal, in the administrative sense, than it concerns the class-room teacher. It may be true, and probably is true, that the children of the A3 class differ very widely in their ability to read orally, but if the best A3 pupils read less readily than the poorest B4 pupils, the problem remains a problem solely for the A3 teacher to solve. If, however, the best A3 pupils read as well as many B4 pupils, and as well as a few A4 pupils, the principal has placed before him for settlement an administrative problem of considerable difficulty, and this spreading over of ability of the same kind through several successive grades constitutes what we know as overlapping. Herein we have material evidence that our indictment against the futility of the graded system was well founded. Just so far as the graded system fails to automatically select in successive groups, pupils of increasingly larger ability, just so far the whole system fails of its purpose.

To illustrate this tendency in detail, I present a table showing the records of 564 elementary school children who read orally for me during the spring of 1917. The table should be read as follows:

Twelve A3 pupils read orally between 60 and 89 words per minute; 25 A3 pupils read between 90 and 119 words per minute; etc.

Oral Reading Rates, January-March, 1917

Words Per Minute

	60-89	90-119	120-149	150-179	180-209	210x	Total	Median
A3	12	25	32	18	3	90	126
B4	12	31	29	23	1	96	126
A4	8	15	29	27	8	3	90	143
B5	1	6	36	45	13	2	103	156
A5	2	3	35	37	16	93	156
B6	3	6	23	32	18	10	92	164
Total	38	86	184	182	59	15	564	

Let me emphasize the fact that this is an actual and not a hypothetical record. The schools which these children attend are well organized, carefully administered schools, where the majority of the pupils come from good American homes, and where retardation due to the presence of foreign-speaking children is at a minimum. As might be expected, columns 1 and 2 show that slow readers are found in all the grades from A3 to A6, the number of such cases decreasing in the higher grades, while columns 5 and 6 show an increasing number of rapid readers as the upper grades are reached. From the administrative standpoint it is of little moment that three B6 children could not read orally more than 90 words per minute, considering that they represent only one-half of one per cent of the whole number tested, but from the standpoint of the individual needs of these three children, such a condition is little short of tragic. How were these children allowed to read in the sixth grade without learning to read at a fair rate of speed? How can such children study lessons in content subjects like geography or history where an ability to gather thought is the prerequisite to the mastery of the lesson? How can such children handle a thought problem in arithmetic if they must consume such a disproportionate part of the assigned time to the mere reading of the subject matter?

To illustrate more definitely how slowly these children read, let us examine a typical page of prose from a standard sixth reader, such as, for example, page 140 of the Horace Mann Sixth Reader, (Longmans, Green & Co.) This page contains 256 words. By referring to the table it will be seen that the median rate for the 92 B6 pupils examined was 164 words per minute. At that rate a child could read page 140 in 1 minute 34 seconds, or to put the matter in a different way, could read in ten minutes 6.41 pages of equal length.

Assuming that the three children referred to, read at the rate of 90 words per minute (which was greatly in excess of their actual rate, as one of them read only a little over 60 words per minute), it would take each 2 minutes 50 seconds to read page 140, or in ten minutes each could read only 3.51 pages of equal length. If one could safely assume that the abnormally slow reader is the better reader, in the sense of retaining more of the thought of the selection, the case would not be so bad, but the contrary is true, as

shown by the scientific literature on the subject. In other words, the rapid reader gathers more thought than the slow reader, not only relatively, but absolutely, thus placing the slow reader at a tremendous disadvantage.

But it is to columns three and four that I particularly invite the reader's attention. One hundred eighty-four pupils read somewhere between 120 and 149 words per minute, and 182 pupils between 150 and 179 words per minute. Of these 23 B6 pupils and 35 A5 pupils read no better than 32 A3 pupils or 29 B4 pupils. Of these 18 A3 pupils read as well as 37 A5 pupils, and 23 B4 pupils as well as 32 B6 pupils. Apparently the graded system failed again to automatically select pupils of increasing ability in successive grades. This, then, is precisely what we mean by overlapping—a spreading out over several grades of pupils equally well equipped to perform a given task. This leads us to the practical problem which confronts the average elementary school principal: How shall overlapping be overcome?

In the first place, by overcoming variability in the several class rooms by the adoption of some such group-method as was advanced in the last paper. In the second place, by exercising such care over the promotion of pupils as to forbid promotion to those pupils who are obviously unfit to advance with their fellows, and by providing individual help for such cases. In the third place, by making a careful examination of the reading ability of each child in the upper grades to insure that no child remains a poor reader after the facts in his case are discovered.

The average teacher is obsessed by the idea that she must bring up each pupil in her class to a theoretical standard of achievements, but, as we have seen in actual practice, the variability in most classes is marked. At this point both teacher and principal need to know what constitutes normal variability. The following scale is suggested as consistent with such expert advice as we can secure at the present time. Arranging our pupils on a scale ranging from Very Poor to Excellent, we may safely assume the relative value of each group to be about as follows, the figures representing the percentage of the entire class to be found in each group:

Very Poor	Fair	Average	Superior	Excellent
5%	15%	60%	15%	5%

This means that in a class of 40 children the normal distribution would be as follows:

Very Poor	Fair	Average	Superior	Excellent
2	6	24	6	2

By combining our Very Poor and Fair children in one group, our Superior or Excellent in another group, and the Average pupils in a third group, we would approximate the grouping suggested in the preceding paper. Such a procedure consistently followed for several terms should greatly reduce variability and consequent overlapping.

The scale adopted for checking the normal amount of variability serves the principal in checking his promotions. Any teacher who fails more than

20% of her class is open to grave suspicion, and in most classes the amount of non-promotion will not exceed 10%. The Excellent and Superior pupils need not wait for promotion time to attain advanced standing, but should be allowed to advance to the class above at any time during the school year when their needs seem to warrant it.

Lastly, every child from the fourth grade on, should be made an object of special study by the principal with respect to oral reading. If a pupil in the upper grades is a poor reader it seems almost imperative that he drop all other subjects for a time until his case is remedied. One of our recent educational writers sums this necessity up in these words:

*"Reading is the most important of all school subjects. It is the key that unlocks the door to all other learning. In every land it is the dividing line between gross ignorance and intelligence. It opens the way into the treasure house of literature, and brings one into contact with the thoughts and deeds of the whole world, present and past. One of the greatest contributions the school can offer to the child is to make him a good reader."

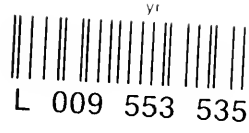
*George Herbert Betts Classroom Method and Management.

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